

**Year A: Christmas 2 – Jer 31:7-14; Ps 84; Eph 1:3-6,15-19a; Mt 2:13-15,19-23
St. Barnabas, Florissant – January 5, 2020**

Focus Sentence: Today we mark a “transition” from the birth to the “life” of Jesus the Messiah, and we wonder if Jesus really is the Messiah.

SERMON

I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....

The readings the morning may at first appear to us to be a hodgepodge of themes or ideas. Jeremiah speaks of God saving a remnant of Israel, ransoming and redeeming Jacob, and this action of God’s is cause for great rejoicing.

Our Psalm response sings of the happiness of those who dwell in the house of the Lord.

Next Paul is writing to the Ephesian Christians, and he tells them about Christians being blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing, and about our adoption as God’s children.

Finally, Matthew writes about three of Joseph’s dreams – the first dream after the departure of the Magi (which we actually commemorate tomorrow, on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6); the second after the death of Herod, which follows by some time the slaughter of the Innocents (which we commemorated back on December 28); and the third dream, which instructs Joseph to return with Mary and Jesus to Nazareth in Galilee instead of to Judea.

Well,.....yes, I guess it might seem like a sort of “hodgepodge.”

PAUSE

But I think that the words of one of my all time favorite Collects, which we prayed this morning, just might help us to tie all this together.

Let’s read it again: “O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ,

There's a lot of theology in those few lines, and it might be helpful, on this second Sunday after Christmas, to "unpack" some of that theology.

PAUSE

First of all, the Collect speaks of human nature, and it states that we Anglican Christians believe that human nature was wonderfully created – human nature is, like all of creation, in God's own words, GOOD! Of course, the Collect goes on to speak of human nature being even more wonderfully restored. This word, "restored," infers the "Fall" of human nature, and this fall requires a "restoration." Like the Israelites back in Jeremiah's time, we have gone astray, we have gone after other gods, gods of our own making. But, as Jeremiah writes to his contemporaries, God consoles, God redeems, God ransoms us fallen human beings. God "yet more wonderfully restores" us.

Then, that really beautiful petition part of the Collect: "Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, ..."

We humans collectively sought to make ourselves like God, to make ourselves into gods to be worshipped – that was our undoing; that was the "Fall." But, with the coming of Jesus, *Emmanuel* God with us, into our world, to be fully and completely human, God gives us the very status we had craved – a share in the divine life. As Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, God freely bestows on us adoption as God's very children. NOT because of anything we humans do to earn or merit this status, but freely – as a gift!

PAUSE

But now, we turn to the Collect's phrase: "him who humbled himself to share our humanity."

In the account of what we call the “flight into Egypt,” we see just how much is involved in this “humbling” of God in Jesus’ becoming human. The family of Jesus must get up in the middle of the night, and leave the country in order to escape from Herod’s death squads. Herod, who will tolerate no challenge to his royal status, wants to kill this child, and so **God with us** becomes a refugee in Egypt.

PAUSE

From another point of view, we see here how Matthew uses Scripture in order to reassure his early (mainly Jewish) Christian congregation about the legitimacy of Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah.

The whole telling of this story of Jesus and Egypt is Matthew’s way of painting a picture of Jesus as the “second Moses,” who (like the first Moses) will save the people of Israel.

Like Moses, when Hebrew children were being killed by a tyrannical pharaoh, Jesus’ life is saved from the rage of a tyrannical king. And, like Moses, Jesus will be called by God out of Egypt into the Promised Land to give his people a home, and a second and NEW Covenant.

Matthew’s other Scriptural reference is a bit more obscure: “He will be called a Nazorean.” Unfortunately, there is no verse in the Hebrew Scriptures that says those exact words, but Matthew might be indulging in some word play here. Isaiah speaks of a “branch” coming from the root or stump of Jesse (David’s father), and the Hebrew word for branch is *nezer*. In addition, “Nazarite” is the term applied to one set apart and consecrated to God in some special way. Finally, of course, Jesus will hail from Nazareth, and is thus a Nazarene. Matthew is quite possibly trying to tie all of these concepts together in his use of the word, Nazorean.

PAUSE

Well, in any case, that's all very interesting, and maybe it sheds some light on the story of the Flight into Egypt. But, we might be asking ourselves, so what? What does all of that mean for us today?

PAUSE

Well, this Sunday marks in a very special way the transition from the "birth" accounts of Jesus into the rest of the Church year (Epiphany, Lent, and on through Pentecost) which deals with the events of Jesus' public "life."

Each of us will be following those events of Jesus' life as we listen each week to their recounting in the Gospel narratives. Each of us will be challenged, as was Matthew's early Christian community, to respond to those events, and to decide for ourselves if this Jesus really is the long-expected Messiah.

Matthew uses "fulfillment of the Scriptures" to reassure his community, but you and I have a somewhat different challenge. You and I must each decide whether this Jesus has touched our lives, whether the events of Jesus' life are such as to elicit our faith in his Messiahship for us *personally*.

In the life of a humble child, who was forced to flee as a refugee into a foreign country, and who grows up to be an itinerant preacher from Nazareth in Galilee, we're confronted with God's offer to save, to console, and to redeem us. Probably not in the exact way we may envision the "more wonderful restoration of human nature," but God's offer nonetheless. And an offer it is --- not anything forced on us. If we're willing to give up our own attempts to be like gods, and if we freely accept this offer from God, God will make us God's children. Sisters and brothers, let's accept that offer once again!

AMEN.